



The Sixty-ninth Season of  
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin  
**Concerts**

National Gallery of Art  
2,803rd Concert

**Fauré Piano Quartett**

Dirk Mommertz, *piano*

Erika Geldsetzer, *violin*

Sascha Frombling, *viola*

Konstantin Heidrich, *cello*

October 27, 2010  
Wednesday, 12:10 pm  
West Building Lecture Hall

*Admission free*

## Program

Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)

*Piano Quartet in A Minor* (1876)

Volker David Kirchner (b. 1942)

*Echo und Narziss — Poème für Violine, Viola, Violoncello,  
und Klavier* (2005)

Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924)

*Piano Quartet no. 1 in C Minor*, op. 15 (1883)

Allegro molto moderato

Scherzo; Allegro vivace

Adagio

Allegro molto

## The Musicians

Formed in 1995, the Fauré Piano Quartett is the only German chamber ensemble of its type. The group is named after Gabriel Fauré, whose two piano quartets are numbered among his most masterful compositions. The ensemble has won top prizes and awards at international chamber music competitions, including the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis and the Parkhouse Award in Great Britain. It has performed on the most important international stages, including Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Berlin's Philharmonie, Hamburg's Laiszhalle and Musikhalle, London's Wigmore Hall, and Rio de Janeiro's Sala Cecilia Meireles and Teatro Colon. The Quartett is also a regular guest at renowned festivals such as the Festival de Radio France at Montpellier, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the Ludwigsburger Festspiele, Kissinger Sommer, the Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival, the Martha Argerich Festival Buenos Aires, the Rheingau Musikfest, and the Schleswig-Holstein Musikfest, among others.

In 2006 the group recorded the two Mozart piano quartets for Deutsche Gramophone in honor of the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth. Two years later, they followed with a CD of the music of Brahms. Additional CD recordings were produced by ARS MUSICI, covering the piano quartets of Antonin Dvořák, Gabriel Fauré, Theodor Kirchner, and Josef Suk.

The Fauré Piano Quartett is currently the quartet-in-residence at the Karlsruhe Music Lyceum, the first piano quartet to have received this honor. Following the example of their influential mentor ensemble, the Alban Berg Quartet, the members of the Fauré Piano Quartett convene regular chamber music seminars. The ensemble appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with Marianne Schmockers Artists of Huntington, New York.

## Program Notes

Composed while Mahler was a student at the Vienna Conservatory, the single-movement *Piano Quartet in A Minor* is one of a number of chamber works the composer wrote between 1875 and 1883. During his years at the conservatory as a student of Robert Fuchs, Mahler won two prizes for movements for piano quintet. This manuscript is the only one of those pieces to have survived, as he destroyed all others. It remained unpublished until the late 1970s.

The movement is in sonata form, based on three contrasting themes. It bears a resemblance to the music of Schumann and Brahms—not surprising for a sixteen-year-old composer writing in 1876. An unusual feature is that the first two themes, normally in contrasting keys in sonata form, both appear in A minor. Mahler compensates for this lack of tonal contrast with his handling of the third theme, which goes through many modulations. The most original feature of the movement is a violin cadenza just before the coda, a device that is normally found only in concertos.

Volker David Kirchner's *Echo und Narziss—Poème für Violine, Viola, Violoncello, und Klavier* (Echo and Narcissus—Poem for violin, viola, violoncello, and piano) was written for and is dedicated to the Fauré Piano Quartet. Through a simple and direct approach to composition, Kirchner makes possible the musical representation of psychological states. The listener is drawn by an undertow of varying colors and frequent shifts between tonality and atonality into the intimate atmosphere of modern music—the world of a present-day romantic.

In the Greek myth that lies behind the piece, the nymph Echo is punished by the goddess Hera, who is angry because Echo's gossip prevented Hera from detecting an amorous affair on the part of her husband, Zeus. From that point on, Hera decrees that Echo may never initiate a conversation, but must only repeat what others have said. Meanwhile, Echo falls in

love with the demigod Narcissus. She is unable to communicate her love to him, and he rejects her, leaving her to fade away to nothing but sound and bones. When the arrogant Narcissus causes yet another suitor to commit suicide, he is cursed by Artemis, goddess of the hunt. As a result, he falls in love with his own reflection, and is doomed to a future of unrequited love and loneliness.

The relatively short piano quartet—its brevity implied by the word “poem” in the title—has two sections. In the first section (“Echo”), the motifs unfold as small collections of tones are repeated with slight variations. The rhythm here is a gently swaying 6/8. The second section (“Narcissus”) follows the first immediately. Here the motifs appear closely juxtaposed, like fragments from a much-too-slow Mahler symphony. The flow of the music seems to suffer from fatigue and depression. Kirchner’s music expresses the deepest human feelings that the two mythical figures would have had at the end of their fate—disorientation, loneliness, and longing.

Gabriel Fauré, probably best known for his prolific output of melodies and chansons, was also a champion of chamber music. Among his contributions to the genre are numerous works for piano and solo instrument, including sonatas and many smaller pieces; a piano trio; two piano quartets; two piano quintets; and one string quartet, composed in 1924, which was his final chamber work. He owed much of his opportunity to compose multiple chamber works to his mentor, Camille Saint-Saëns, who founded the Société Nationale de Musique, a concert organization dedicated to performing new works by young French composers. It was at one of these concerts that Fauré’s *First Piano Quartet* was premiered in 1880, with the composer at the piano. Responding to criticism from some of his colleagues, Fauré later revised the finale, and the work was published in 1883.

From the outset, the quartet exhibits a number of traits that distinguish Fauré's music—his shapely handling of sonata form, an ongoing dialogue among deftly worked melodies, and adept writing for piano. Like much of Fauré's output, the writing is urbane, but in the first movement there is also a predominance of high spirits. Romanticism and its doleful heroics are left behind, as are the frivolous, the formulaic, and the balletic. The second movement (*Scherzo*) surprises with a blithe, pizzicato *perpetuum mobile*. The *Adagio* demonstrates that profound passion is not incompatible with balance and classical purity of line. Finally, the soaring *Allegro molto* caps the work with a shimmer of gaiety that gracefully shifts between the major and minor modes.

*Notes on Kirchner by Konstantin Heidrich*

*Notes on Mahler and Fauré by Stephen Ackert, head, music department,  
National Gallery of Art*

Next Week at the National Gallery of Art

**National Gallery of Art Orchestra**  
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Music by Gluck, Haydn, Schubert, and other composers

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East Building Auditorium



**New York Chamber Soloists**

Music by Delius, Sullivan, and Vaughan Williams

Presented in honor of *The Pre-Raphaelite Lens:*  
*British Photography and Painting, 1848–1875*

November 3, 2010  
Wednesday, 12:10 pm  
West Building Lecture Hall

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

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Washington, DC

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